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GEORGE WYNDHAM

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GEORGE WYNDHAM

By

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LONDON

ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS

1913

PREFATORY NOTE

THIS little paper appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine* for October, and—very faintly varied—is republished by the kindness of Mr Reginald Smith, K.C. One or two friends of George Wyndham (and of the writer) suggested that it should be amplified, and further excerpts from letters added to those already given with the approval of Mr Wyndham's family. A postscript omitted in the *Cornhill* is introduced, and a single letter on a light occasion. But the collection of George Wyndham's letters is in the proper hands; while to say more about their author (or even to recast a fugitive form) was beyond me. Others who have tried to write on a similar occasion may understand this.

C. B.

St Andrew's Day, 1913.

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ON May 30, 1913, George Wyndham wrote to an old friend from Clouds, the beautiful country home in South Wilts which he had not long since inherited, together with a fine tradition of beneficent service, from his remarkable father, and where he himself was opening up before him a whole world of new duties: 'I am afraid you are going off somewhere, but if by chance your plans are altered I want you to be here on Friday, the 13th. The country is a miracle of beauty.'

Friday, the 13th, came, and the old friend, with many other old friends, very soberly and dutifully came to Clouds. The country was a miracle of beauty when all that was mortal of George Wyndham was laid to rest in the quiet churchyard hard by.

Weeks and months have passed since that lovely, intolerable day, and it is incredible to those who knew him that George Wyndham is dead. They see him, they hear him everywhere, who touched life at so many points, and at so many points touched and vivified the lives of his friends. Hard enough they may well find it to speak of him beyond a narrow circle. Everyone knew George Wyndham; not many knew the man whose

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absence some of us must labour to dissemble. Though his kindliness and goodwill no one ever doubted, his was not a universal good-fellowship of the kind that gets itself immediately recognised: an influence rather penetrating and subtle is of the nature of an intensive culture, not to be carried broadcast over a wide-world surface. Consequently there is a limit to the world's recognition of him, which is far less wide than his own power of recognition and sympathies deserve. These were catholic indeed, things and people the most dissimilar 'inuring' to him, in Walt Whitman's word, much more sympathetically and closely than they do, paradoxically enough, to the more obviously sympathetic person. His was a gallant figure. He loved books, the open air, music, the sentiment of wine and fellowship, games, gardens, the far-away illimitable spaces at the ends of the Empire, the nested valleys and water-meadows, encompassed by vast downs, of his own countryside. He belonged (and the quotation is due to a schoolboy grieving for him) to the company of the Great Companions, 'enjoyers of calms of seas and storms of seas.' And he successfully essayed in his short space three careers—as soldier, statesman, and man of letters. But his friends know that there was 'more to him' than these things imply; and sympathies wider and more delicate than you expect or find accountable from such an endowment and public form:—a steady burning pity always for the under-dog, and that rarer gift of comprehension which wins to human touch with

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those whom few enough care to think of and consider—the merely difficult, unamiable, impossible people of this world. They reflect that there is no sore or difficult place in life where he could not have helped, no good moment in life which would not have been the better worth living for his presence and understanding; nor can any good, it seems, come to any of them hereafter that will not be the less worth while for his not being there. So it is that friends may measure their loss. It was natural at his own funeral to recall George Wyndham as he showed at that of another—his old friend, William Ernest Henley. To Wyndham, Henley's death was a heavy blow and sorrow. No one felt it more nearly. But when the service at Brookwood was over, and the little throng of friends waited for the train to take them back to London, and an everyday impoverished, some may remember how Wyndham went among them keeping everybody up, as the Colour-Sergeant in the Barrack-Room Ballad steadies and holds up Files-on-Parade. Thus, with his smile, and the kindling eye that took in so much, George Wyndham rallied the mourners, and now that he himself is gone, death never seemed so nearly an empty name. He must be somewhere on ahead, you feel, waving an encouraging hand or waving his sword as someone records his doing, a boy in the Sûdan, when his battalion of the Coldstream got the order to advance. But not dead he who encouraged others in the presence of death and of its dreariest concomitants. It is characteristic of

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his place in certain lives that one who stood near enough to him in the little Wiltshire church the other day to be able to stretch out a hand and touch the coffin writes that he just kept himself going by looking up and meeting, as he fancied, the clear strong eyes. 'Be within winking distance' was his final direction to a private secretary before going in to face and take the leading part at a critical turn of a memorable Parliamentary Commission. It was on brotherly terms that George Wyndham worked with his subordinates—with Files-on-Parade—and so gave, so sought reassurance. No one ever met his eye, morally or physically, at any moment of strain or tension, no one, that is, who worked with him and under him, without an answering sense of encouragement and reassurance.

Such an one seeks here to set down these notes from eighteen years' unbroken intimacy, fumbling painfully and awkwardly the while. The things best remembered cannot be told; and, that obvious difficulty apart, so much seems to have been said already, and said so well, that the last word were perhaps that of the old Scots golf caddy who approached an employer in bereavement with a raised hand, and a 'there's naething to be said.' Yet in that old golf professional's country men used to speak of 'raising up a testimony'; and against constraint and difficulty there presses the instinct to raise one's own.

Since June 13 much has been written about George Wyndham and many brave, true, dis-

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criminating words uttered in his praise. But in some instances, not in all, the writers do not seem able to get away from the obviously decorative part of him, his personal good looks, the gallant soldier side. A famed statesman and an old friend whom he loved and admired has spoken in *The Times* of Wyndham's 'noble and distinguished ancestry, his singular beauty of face and form.' These in truth made up a part of his personality which no one is likely to forget. 'Race' he had, and what 'race' at its best implies; notably that simplicity and ease of manner in any society which is as a torch held to the pomposity of the *arriviste*—funny and sad by contrast. But twenty years ago, George Wyndham's good looks were of a kind to take one's breath away. As he sat his horse at a meet, or passed through a public place, people's eyes followed him; and this grace of person remained with him to the last, only rarer and finer, if more wistful for the years. But one has often thought that hence came a certain wrong to him in life, helping with his facility of accomplishment and signal dexterity in so many fields to mislead about him people not behind the scenes. It was hard for them to realise that this radiant person was the most diligent and conscientious of students, most unsparing of hard workers, always intent, as Lord Lansdowne testifies, 'upon getting to the root of things . . . grasping details and expounding them with an unrivalled lucidity.' To few, indeed, is it given to combine rare powers of imagination with a turn for detail and a joyful mastery over it.

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Yet Wyndham combined them, and thoroughness was as much his special characteristic as any other. No one ever worked harder. Take Literature, for which he had so fine an instinct. Small was the vintage of his prose and verse; but nobody denies that it was of distinguished quality, that he wrote well, wrote brilliantly. Yet for many people he had written better had he taken less pains. It was his way, at the cost of infinite trouble, to be something over-elaborate. He recognised and accepted this as inseparable from work. 'I envy X. his simplicity and easy precision,' he wrote, contrasting something of his own with that of another man of letters. 'I don't doubt that Swift, his man, should be my man also, or is the supreme model for all of us, and that the paper you have just revised would be better for a barer method. But then, Old Boy, the plainer way of writing wouldn't be *Me*.' His temperament as a man of letters had in truth its affinity to those workmen in rich fabrics, the Elizabethans. A certain colour and flamboyance was as natural to George Wyndham as to these renowned forerunners. And he might have added in his defence that he seldom trod an easy or a beaten track and was 'out' to catch and convey in words, thoughts and shades of thought not too easily put in harness. Also that he always had something to say, his mind being of amazing fecundity.

It should be seen hereafter that he had the genius of the letter-writer; and he could come in late from the House at any hour, and after a strain

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which would have sent most strong men thankfully to bed, sit down and write long letters to two or three different friends as dissimilar as the different interests which he and they had in common. Your born letter-writer is usually supposed to be a prattler, and Wyndham could trifle on paper with any man. Yet hardly ever were the sentences which sprang from his pen without their idea, or information, or a quaint fancy. To return to the prose of his serious literary work, that savoured of anything but the light horseman. We think, and have perhaps sufficiently implied, that the style of his letters was as a rule happier, as it was easier, than that of the *Essays upon North and Plutarch* in the Tudor translations and those on the *Pleiade* and on *Shakespeare*. The point is that not one of these flashing chromatic sentences was brilliant for brilliancy's sake. He sought what seemed an appropriate dress for his thoughts, and these were not simple. Again, if he worked hard at his palette, he was careful for the draughtsman's 'line.' His prose had that unusual quality; and 'line' which is proportion, co-ordination, the organic development of an idea, comes not but by stern hard work. All this is scarcely the facile dilettante. Immense trouble and pains, brain-work severe and persistent, went to the making of anything George Wyndham wrote. For days in country or in town, when not in office, well into the small hours when a Minister, he wrote and rewrote, making 'skeletons,' making 'bridges,' arranging and re-arranging his material. One sees him at the

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lamplit table covered with papers, the straight back very straight and upright, the dark grey head held high and rather far back from his manuscript, a cigarette—too constant—in the muscular left hand. He rises, flits with slim, incommunicable ease about the room, taking down a book, verifying a reference, or bends again upon his manuscript, stilling interruption with a movement of the hand and an elliptic half-sentence, part impatient, part caressing; then he swings round on you, shakes his head with a humorous twitch of the eyebrow and a smile, both mysterious and arch, and reads out, with what *brio* and humour, the passage which he has just ‘pulled off.’ That might embody an argument too ingenious and subtle, if immensely plausible, for his listener to follow, or one perhaps not plausible but dazzling paradox; and before his listener’s bewilderment and his own occasional discomfiture his appreciation and his laughter were whole-hearted. Few men who practise an art have laughed so soundly and joyfully at their own foibles. ‘P—,’ he said once of friend and sister, ‘has a mind which sees through a deal board, she always understands me before I have spoken.’ ‘Worse,’ said the accustomed listener with some bitterness; ‘she understands you after you have spoken’; and George Wyndham’s laughter rang. Before he wrote or ordered out his materials he had ransacked his authorities. Few professional students have gone down more resolutely among the dust of libraries. He is remembered flitting about the Reading Room of the British Museum

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or bending in a corner hour after hour, or day after day, perhaps to verify half-a-dozen references—the books invoked in his quest arranged about him till he seemed ‘in laager’; reading at sight the Latin notes of German commentators—for this was a Guardsman who had retaught himself Latin after leaving school, and taught or retaught himself enough Greek to make his way joyfully one Christmas holiday through some books of the *Iliad*.

He was, no doubt, a scholar born. But his secretaries, in Ireland and at the War Office, know how he toiled as few have ever toiled in the most exacting and the dullest details of administration and routine. ‘The ’igh Society tack won’t really wash,’ he writes in 1900 from the War Office, noticing some newspaper view of him. ‘I never go into Society. I fought in the Sûdan. I have been a railway director for ten years. I plugged at the Irish Office through all the scrimmage; I am plugging away now. You know that.’

His fame, by which one means the peculiar iridescent place accorded him in men’s minds, has stood rather in the way of their recognising his best claim to distinction. Mr Balfour may have been thinking so when he said in the House of Commons that George Wyndham’s qualities, though admired, had not attained the place or recognition which they deserved. Perhaps it would be as true to say that his obvious qualities have obscured his innate and finer ones. For what George Wyndham really was was less apparent in success

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than in partial success, such as by common standards signifies comparative failure. It was considered failure of a sort when the Unionist Party returned to power in '95 and Wyndham was not given office. Men in Parliament or writing in the Press had taken for granted that he would have at least an Under-Secretaryship of State. His abilities justified that view, and so did his services to the Party. . . . But if Wyndham felt any disappointment he never showed it. He went about his work in Parliament with undiminished energy and loyalty, and was busy in his spare time with literature. The edition of North's Plutarch, in Mr Henley's Tudor Translations, was published about this time, with the essay on Plutarch, which was hailed by men of letters and by the Press on both sides of politics as something of a classic in its kind. A man of the camp, the forum, but also of books, to this study he had brought his knowledge and wide experience as a man of action as well as his rare literary instinct.

Plutarch, no doubt, was more attuned to his own taste and temperament in the medium of Amyot and North than in the bare original, and at least this study ranks as Wyndham's best and most important work. To some of us a paper, read years later at Edinburgh (before, I think, the Pen and Pencil Club), on Sir Walter Scott, stands in yet more affectionate remembrance for a veracity and an easy and intimate charm recalling his letters. Edinburgh too, recalls the brilliant address on the

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'Springs of Romance in the Literature of Europe,' delivered by Wyndham as Lord Rector of that University in 1910. That given at Glasgow in 1904, when he was Rector of the Western University, though brilliant, was less equal. 'I am not happy about it,' he wrote ; 'it is suggestive but congested. I have written it with blood and sweat, and amid continual interruption.' That he should have written at all in the strain and collar of the Irish Secretaryship is sufficiently surprising. 'It' was indeed rather over-written. The studies of Shakespeare, of Ronsard and the Pléiade, and the remarkable suggestive contribution to the psychology of fear and the sensations of men in battle contained in his review of Stephen Crane's 'Red Badge of Courage,' were conceived if they were not written at this period, succeeding the General Election of 1895. There may be no harm in saying that Mr Henley considered the last pages of this War paper to be the best and most brilliant of George Wyndham's writing. 'Genius,' said Mr Henley to the writer, banging a great hand on a table ; indeed one does not know where, out of Tolstoy, one has received the same emotion and sense of reality as in George Wyndham's spoken impressions of the intimacy of battle. The average soldier does and no doubt sees ; he cannot usually tell. George Wyndham was a man of action who took his share in what had to be done, saw, felt, and afterwards remembered.

Then into his life came South Africa. At his home in Cheshire, one New Year memorable for

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snow, good exercise in the open air, good talk of books and joyous merriment indoors, came news, the thunderbolt of the Jameson Raid. It seemed at first madness, an incident of chaos. Only Mr Chamberlain, as early as January 7, 1896, so kept his head as to recognise (his dispatch of that day remains still in proof) that the Raid was the consequence and not the cause of an intolerable condition of things. Presently George Wyndham was in it all up to the hilt. It seems odd now to remember that the search for a popular article for Mr Henley's *New Review* brought him first to Old Burlington Street, and to all that came after. Of Mr Rhodes himself at this season he had only a glimpse, enough for himself to recognise but not then to be recognised by the Colossus, that great, bewildering, and sometimes bewildered, figure. But he took the measure of another whose praise was not then in all the churches, nor his statesmanship, lucidity, and complete disinterestedness as yet equally the admiration of Boer and Briton. Briefly, George Wyndham understood the men and grasped the issues. He it was who saw there was a case of vast urgency and importance put fairly before the British people, he virtually who started the South African Association and its years of memorable service. He was the first Parliamentary Chairman, followed presently by Alfred Lyttelton, and he was the moving spirit and inspiration. His speech in July '96 at the first General Meeting, presided over by the Duke of Argyll, made an impression on Englishmen from over-sea which

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has not faded, and was a turning-point in his own career. In July '96 he went to South Africa, and wherever he passed throughout the sub-continent he was understood and appreciated by colonists, Dutch and English. A famous member of the Cape Ministry of that day recalled just yesterday the vivid impression made by Wyndham's first appearance in his office; far-away farmers, engine-drivers, miners, Hollander officials of then sinister eminence, and an ancient Boer, survivor of the Great Trek, are among those who in the intervening years have eagerly recalled one who came among them sixteen years ago, courteous, eager, understanding, singly fair and singly anxious to learn all they could tell him at first hand. He made his way to Rhodesia, where the Matabele were still in arms, and was in the Matoppos with Mr Rhodes when the chiefs came in. He won, and to keep, Rhodes' confidence and understanding. 'Thought he was a Spring poet,' said Mr Rhodes; 'instead of that, he is all chapter and verse.' And if Rhodes with Mr Balfour and Henley are rightly said to have affected his talent, he gave in this case as good as he got. He returned from South Africa with a conviction, personal and political, which never left him; and it was in those days almost to the terror of his listeners in the Lobby that he became, in effect, Member for South Africa in the Commons.

In '97 Wyndham was a member of the British South African Commission which sat on Mr Rhodes, and, of all people, the late Mr Labouchere expressed

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a strong admiration for his extreme readiness and dexterity at the opposite side of the earth and the question. Others gave of their time and energy to the work of the Imperial South African Association, and they are not forgotten, but they would agree in this estimate of George Wyndham's part in it. They followed his policy who sent delegates to Australia and to Canada when the late Mr Davis Allen expounded the case for England and South Africa before the members of the Dominion Parliament. And however things in South Africa may have looked since, for George Wyndham those who espouse a cause, now as ever, in Cecil Rhodes' words, that of Equal rights for every civilised man south of the Zambesi, are in the words of the Bidding Prayer, 'specially bound to pray.'

In '98 there came the War Office, and much battling with circumstances which, however clear-eyed, he could not control. Two things stand out, the confidence of soldiers in him and the great speech of 1900. 'I shall go nap on Monday,' he writes to a friend; and again on another occasion, 'I know that if I got up and said the one thing to make the Commander-in-Chief Secretary for State, and the other to democratise the army, everyone would say 'Here is the strong man,' instead of which I should be the weak man who knows and lies in order to agree with those who do not know'; and once more: 'I am all for being hanged politically, but only if that function prove an integral part of some organic scheme for reforming the defence of the country.' He 'went

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nap,' as we know, and not vainly, when the House answered to an appeal made to it not for Party and colleagues, but for the cause of England.

Then came Ireland. It was from the first a period of strain and sacrifice, but quite early it was plain he understood and was understood by Ireland, and this his labour would not be lost. 'I like my province,' he writes in December 1900; 'it can be governed only by conversation and arbitrary decisions; to be an affable but inexorable Haroun al Raschid is the only chance.' And once more: 'I throw myself into this show, but at times the twinge of separation from friends and home life, from my part in "the wide world" dreaming upon things to come, is sharp in this grey and circumscribed horizon. Yet it is good discipline and good training. . . . I have my province.' 1903 brought the crux—the great opportunity. On March 3, 1903, he writes on the eve of bringing in the Irish Land Purchase Bill: 'To-morrow I must imprimis be understood by Irish patriots and City brokers, and to be intelligible is a serious enterprise, a desperate adventure. If I may put it in an Irish way, on a first-reading speech ebullitions must be submerged. But underneath my cautious and platitudinarian diction there will be many tacit phrases and quotations *sub voce*. To wit: I believe that a benignant spirit is abroad—see W. Wordsworth. Or since it is a Lady-day and *my Lady's Birthday*, all sorts of pretty words I shall be thinking but not saying. . . . Of these things I shall be thinking; but I shall be speaking of "paramount

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interest" and "flotations below par" of Consols at 90. My God! . . . ' But the happiness of George Wyndham's home and the Influence pervading it, and how much all that has implied to others, this is not to be told. . . .

The success of Lady-day, 1903, was immediate in the House and outside it. Everybody approved the Wyndham Act and admired the way in which its author piloted it through the Commons. The exposition was a remarkable performance, and the delivery, which sometimes was his obstacle, was quiet and free from any over-nervous activity distracting to his audience. The chiselled sentences stood out in black and white before a House alternately hushed and vociferous with applause. The occasion and event proved that Wyndham had found the way to better things for Ireland, and this part of his work survives his successors, and has brought unlooked-for happiness to a whole people. He was now feeling his way to clinch and complete that work, when thwarting and obstruction lay before him veiled. In October 1903 George Wyndham wrote: 'It is a curious development that with Exchequer, Colonies and War Office vacant, I should feel it an absolute duty to stay here. You will none of you (excepting yourself and dear Henley when still with us) quite understand how imperative is my duty here.

'If I had deserted them, all the work since A. J. B. in '87 to '91 would have been imperilled and the tender plant of belief in our sincerity rooted up, not ever to be sown again until after another

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weary round of fifteen or twenty years. Now it thrives and is beginning to shoot forth the frailest tendril of further belief in the Empire. Will it some day receive and shelter the birds of the air? I do not know. But just now, and without prejudice, and until cause is otherwise shown, and with all the qualifications you can suggest, they do still in fact believe in me.'

He was right in believing he was needed, justified in being hopeful. But had disappointment loomed palpably overhead, could he have foreseen not the successful working of the Land Act only, but the reverse, and resignation that followed, those who know George Wyndham cannot doubt that he must have held on. It is here the real man emerges. He had aimed at the best, and as a friend has finely said elsewhere,¹ 'A man who is ahead of public opinion and who concentrates his whole attention on discovering the best is in danger of failing with the very fulness of his success.' What he sought was practicable had his power been supreme. He could not forego the great stroke—the safe stroke too had the mass been equally clear-eyed with himself—and play for his own security. One thinks of Milner—whom Wyndham so much admired and valued, and who, before the end, may have replaced with him earlier admirations—before the Conference of Bloemfontein. The Bond leaders confidently predicted that Milner would take what Kruger gave him and let the English in the Transvaal go; —'If he doesn't he will lose a diplomatic success,

¹ 'George Wyndham,' by W. W., in *Quarterly Review*.

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I tell you, man, etc., etc.!' Not to Milner or to Wyndham did diplomatic or personal success appeal, but Milner had a Man in Downing Street to back him and the English people behind the Man, and Wyndham was otherwise supported. The truth could be told at some length, but need not be. Probably he was honestly enough frustrated by forces which, properly enlightened, should most strongly have backed him. Whether those who did apprehend the issues and yet bowed before the opposition of these forces were justified need not be considered. He who made no complaint for himself shall have none made for him. . . . Only the vision of a club smoking-room across St George's Channel rises before us and the distant figure of George Wyndham surrounded by men and talking, and of a wise permanent official at one's side who shook his head, saying: 'These fellows are going to play the mischief. They can't understand what he is at; they take him up wrongly, and will put others in the wrong about him. The youth with the red hair—do you see him?—is actually a spy on Wyndham. He means no harm, but not intentionally but idiotically will get the wrong end of the stick and pass it on to others. . . .' Possibly at this period Wyndham might have been helped by a trusty 'foolometer' (or even 'knavometer') less at opposite poles than himself to the famous heresy of Frederick. He was not then accessible to old associates with whom he could let himself go. Perhaps, also, he trusted people too much. But Wyndham was used to

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trusting people, alike under and over him. *Fides nudaque veritas* with two dates—that of the superscription, that of a first association years before—so he wrote on the cover of a Rectorial Address before tossing it over to one of the many who had served him as secretary. Of such was his form and habit. He could not understand that *fides nudaque veritas* could be absent from any intimate association bent on serving big impersonal ends.

His resignation was given. He took all the blame and took it smiling, silencing those who might, not ineffectively, have cried out. It is a mistake to say that Ireland broke his heart. His faith was too strong in the right way, as he had conceived and fashioned it, for him to despair, and he was clear that only by recurring to his lines could the work, which the Land Act began, be completed. Sad enough at heart he was for Ireland and the delay and muddle which might follow in the meanwhile; possibly and with justice, he felt a pang for men of like ideals to himself driven to compromise therewith. He was not too sorry for George Wyndham.

So the story of this defeat is a story of victory. He went on with his work, having repaired in part the health injured in Ireland. He spoke manfully on platforms and formidably in the House, particularly on Army matters. He was a 'last-ditcher' by conviction and on principle, and if it be true the effect of the Parliament Act has been less to weaken the House of Lords than to

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paralyse the House of Commons, his attitude two years ago is justified as well of its wisdom as of its honesty. His belief in Unionism and Tariff Reform as the only road for patriotic men out of the muddle was never so keen and logical. 'Many thanks for a most opportune letter on Socialism,' he writes in late 1907; 'I agree that wild hitting is worse than useless, but I am sure that some hitting there must be. I am off to Perth for an orgy of speaking,' and, in what he called his 'shorthand,' follow his notes of the line proposed.

'I mean, at the risk of boring my audience and failing completely, to tackle Socialism and all the -isms. My chain of thought is:

'(1) Individualism—the real Cobdenite theory to which X asks me to revert—

'Ignored the State. Pretended the world was, or would be, cosmopolitan, which it is not and will not be.

'Asserted Capital would go anywhere, which is true—too true! And that Labour would follow, which is false.

'Under that system, even as it is, we have Cosmopolitan Capital and "stranded" Labour.

'(2) *Hence* the demand for Socialism.

'But that is out of the frying-pan into the fire.

'Criticism of Socialism.

'But there *is* a great Problem. Penury—overpopulation, depopulation, unemployment. To defeat false remedy and find a true one we need a Policy based on Principle and supported by a united Party.

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‘(3) Is that to be found in Government ?

‘Obviously not.

‘(4) In Unionism ? *Yes.*

It grasps the reality of the ‘State’ in all its bearings ; in its external relations and, not less, in its relations to the individual, *not as an individual in a cosmopolitan world but as a citizen of the State.* And for this we must accept legitimate development of Unionist principle—*i.e.* Tariff Reform. Them’s my sentiments.

He spoke of leaving Westminster in, say, another five years unless he should be needed and he found absorbing work for a landowner of practical imagination in his own countryside. He had literary work marked out and a fine library made, as he liked to point out, by local work, while he had made a chapel for another. Here, for example, is good counsel upon composition, culled, as these letters are, at random from the accumulation of eighteen years :

‘I have “perpended”—*et pour cause*—indeed I had not time to read your letter until now—4 P.M. of the 23rd.

‘Of course I shall be delighted to look over the lecture, and would like to talk over the line out of doors one morning.

‘I notice—with interest—that the Omnipotent makes you seasick when in the throes of composition. Here is another bond between us.

‘My general advice is to have the throes of composition—and nausea—early. There are only two ways of making a lecture. The first is, at

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your ease, without effort, in happy moments to jot down on loose sheets—or in a washing-book—anything bright, profound, true, amusing or prophetic, that appears—at such moments—to be remotely connected with the subject you propose to discuss. This is the method of the “*mot d'image*.” You just put dabs, or coils, of attractive paint on a palette. And so far all is delightful. But then—after that—you have to look at the palette and wonder what sort of a picture you can paint with those colours. This is the devil—but a small devil.

‘The second way of making a lecture is to make yourself ill—to be sick—in search of a primordial plan that embraces the eternal essence of your theme. This is the devil—and a huge DEVIL. And so far all is Hell. But then—after that—a structure rises and a lasting habitation for human thought. That is delightful and a joy for ever; for a “thing of beauty” is created.

‘The first plan is the only one when you have no time. But the second is right and a matter of obligation when you have time. It has also the incidental advantage of getting the sea-sickness over at the beginning; so that—to vary the metaphor, and why not vary it?—the rest of the voyage is over halcyon seas.

‘The Corinthian style of this letter is dictated by a savage need to average my output after the austere reasoning of the speech I made last night.

‘It is possible—not certain—that I might take you out for a walk on Saturday morning.’

Again:

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‘The speeches you commend were excursions “into the enemy’s country.” I prefer—as a staple of living—to hunt with Percy and dine off roast mutton with my lady wife. By this absence of device, in despite of falsely supposed artistic divagation, I push and eat my way to a thorough understanding of the English. As thus; on Monday, I spoke at Birmingham; on Tuesday, I attended the House and dined at “the” Club; on Wednesday, I attended the House closely; but, on Thursday I came here and, so, hunted with Percy Friday and Saturday; “walked” a “Point-to-point Race” course with him and Bendor to-day (after attending Church in the morning), dined with Percy and a *trois* for the fourth evening in succession, and to-morrow go back for a hideous week of the House and Railway Boards. So repulsive is that week, ending as it does with responding for “Literature” at Whitefriars on Friday—and may they be fried!—so grim is it, that I adjourn our reunion until it is well or ill over.

‘I am now in middle life. That means (1) that I enjoy being at home and riding to hounds and (2) that in all human likelihood—nay in inevitable certainty—I cannot have these joys for much longer. In ten years P—— will be thirty-one; and, too probably, married. In ten years I may be fat or busy. Very well. Am I to forego the very marrow of life when I have its thigh-bone between my teeth? Am I to parade at Westminster and intrigue in its purlieus? No! The answer is “No.”

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‘I have a wife, a son, a home, six good hunters and a library of Romance literature. I mean to enjoy them. If I am wanted, I can be found. I spare you Cincinnatus and Cato major.

‘In this part of the world I am known as “The Colonel” quâ Yeomanry; as a subscriber to the Cheshire Hounds; and, politically, as a robust “true-blue” with honest leanings towards Protection. And besides I love to hear the thrushes sing and to watch a pair of lesser-spotted woodpeckers that are building in our garden.

‘P.S.—What is a letter without a postscript? Let me add that I am 10 lbs. lighter than I was; that I have made 29 speeches since Oct. 18th and hunted on 26 days, that I have read a good deal of Virgil; and much early French both of the Trouvères and, in smaller quantities, of the Troubadours. That I have studied the trade returns; Dizzy’s “Sibyl”; Charlotte Bronte’s “Shirley”; some Carlyle and Ruskin, to get the reflection in literature of the political ineptitudes that *must* be remedied. That is “the kind of hairpins we are.” To balance Dizzy (early) and Carlyle, I also read Bagehot and Lord — in *The Times*. But they don’t balance, anything, but their ledgers; or discount, anything, but bills.

‘It is clear to me, now, that the British Race has one foe—Cosmopolitan Finance with an oriental complexion. Delenda est Carthago is all my song. I have twice repaired to the crest of the Cheshire hills and looked at the fat, fair expanse of English fields with their smouldering

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girdle of chimneys around the far horizon. And I have sworn that they shall not be sucked like eggs by the weazels of pure finance. No, nor the plains of Ireland either! I have sworn and it shall be in accordance with my oath.'

But it was very unlikely he would have ever been allowed to maintain his retirement. His case was like one who said: 'No rest but in the grave for Sir Walter.'

In another letter he writes mournfully enough of the future:

'I hate bothering anybody about my private affairs, but the difficulties of the country gentry have ceased to be private. I hear that next year's Budget is to finish off those who love the land.

'Very well. I don't believe it. But even if it should prove true—we have no grievance against Fate. We are not forced to say with Fleury, after Sedan, "never mind, we have amused ourselves well for twenty years," because we have been a happy part in the being and doing of England for much longer. I shall stick on—and your letter helps, in its degree, to shew how.

'These personal and class problems do not interest me much. [I am not supercilious.] The pictures and 'marbles' and books that the Gentry collected, were worth collecting. The sport they gave their neighbours was worth giving. The services they gave their country—when others had no opportunity—as soldiers and sailors and ambassadors and statesmen have been duly—perhaps excessively

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—acknowledged. Their “urn” will not be “unlamented.”

‘What does interest me—I will not say frighten me, for, rather, it suddenly arrests attention—is the census of production. It startles to know that, of all our people, only 7,000,000 produced only £700,000,000’s worth of goods (omitting agriculture and fishing) in a “boom” year, 1907. Just think what that means. It means less than £2 a week per producer for Taxes, Rates, depreciation, experiment, profits and wages.

‘In the light of that revelation the “minimum wage” and the National Temperance Bill become incredible. The balance of wealth—falsely so-called—comes from investment—*e.g.* the Robinson Mine; and “virtuoso” performances—*e.g.* the barrister who earns £20,000 a year; and the Musical Comedy lady who earns £100 a week.

‘It is—politics apart—impossible to tax *Finance* and “imaginaries”—*i.e.* skill in producing intellectual or sensual luxuries—without smashing the machine that makes production possible, and extends the higher rewards that persuade a people to produce.

‘The situation — quite apart from Germany’s challenge, Ireland’s dissidence, and the Coal Crisis —is dark and damnably like Byzantium before the Turks took that Banking centre in 1453 (I think?).

‘But just because the future is so dim and the present so precarious, it is more worth our while to be living. To hear a thrush sing in February

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or to see a soldier on "sentry-go" prove that it is very well to live in England and right to die there, or elsewhere, for England. I am dropping into the ballad vein; as thus . . . how shall it go?

'THE SOLDIER'S SONG. (*To German air.*)

' I'll not bewail my Home
Or loves that waved Good-bye!
Soldiers engage to roam,
Without a sigh.

' Far lands are calling loud;
Louder than winds that cry,
But I am glad and proud
To do or die.

'That is the sort of stuff that soldiers like to sing. But—as Ruskin observed in the "Roots of Valour"—they do go and they do die—if need be; whereas the merchant and the usurer do not go and do not die. They remain and prosper.

'*P.S.*—The Socialist's argument depends on asserting that a paint-brush is a little broom; because it looks like it and houses *must* be swept; whereas the picture *need not be* painted.

'For all that I am—this may shock you—theoretically persuaded that a minimum wage is right; with, of course, the corollary that the man who can't earn it is a deserving object of discriminating

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charity. Ruskin was right. The State ought to launch the young; and provide a haven for the old. Between youth and age the State should say that a good man deserves a living. At what year in the human span you can end youth and begin age depends on the amount of wealth accumulated. It is really simple. Nothing surprises me more, than that we do—in the country—give a “minimum wage” and yet are horrified at proposing it for the town. I pay a stableman £1 in Cheshire and 16s. in Wiltshire. If he cannot groom two horses I get someone else. This has been done for 200 years in the country. It is not Socialism, but a survival of the wise Middle Ages. Cobden was a donkey.’

Saughton Grange and a June evening reflect a happier mood:

‘I knew the “Shropshire Lad” of old, but I read the book through twice to myself in the train and a quarter of it aloud to S—— after dinner. The roses in the garden and buttercups in the field are beyond science. Tho’ seen, they belong to faith; like young love and armies at last confronted. Of the clusters and explosions of crimson roses on the crimson tower I will not write. Some other art must be invented by man before we too can shout of summer without making any noise, even of a pen. An element in that art will be to have oceans of green round our silent crimson trumpets, and new-mown lawns leading up to them, to the shadows of trees.

‘When I see summer I feel justified of the only

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attack I have ever made on the Roman Church.
That attack you may read if you turn this page:

‘ECCLESIA ROMANA

‘Vast is the space enclosed within your naves,
And vaster by the twilight they confine
When sunsets loom through stain’d glass on a
shrine,
And cierges twinkle by remember’d graves.

‘Your ogives are more strong than architraves,
Your columns stand and soar to the divine;
The odour of age and adamant of lime
Suspire a hushed security that saves.

‘But how to enter through a cabin’d porch?
Bowing the head were easy. But to estrange
Our heritage of Summer for a torch,
And tell our hearts no longer to be free,
Is an impossible disloyalty
To the sky’s franchise and the wild world’s range.

‘How easy it is to write of the contrast to what
we adore. Housman writes of death and suicide,
because he loves the May and the dusty roads of
England, and lads insolent with life. All the Art
of the World has only caught a few larks in a few
cages to remind man of Summer in the blind-alleys
of his slum.’

Here is a letter charged with just reproaches.
By insufficient directions as to place—conveyed

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on too official note-paper, bearing the emblem of a famous Body—Mr Wyndham's dinner trembles in the balance.

'Were I a Frenchman I should address you thus:—"animal"—a term in their language of affectionate reproach. I asked you "if" and "when" I was to dine. You have answered and I am your humble servant. But as the Italians have it—"anche"—I asked you "where"? "bisogna," as they would add, that you leave me the choice, and hazard, of all London, S.W. To revert to the vernacular "Where, damme, is the bottle to be broached?" Your style is too condensed.

'I scan and search your second attempt to ask me to dinner. I am gratified by the image of an elephant, I am impressed by the stern command, "All communications to be addressed to *The Secretary*." Quite so. Time is very well, and punctuality, on which you insist, is a princely virtue, but "Place," too, pertains to the scheme of things and is essential to a social gathering. I may—nay, must—telegraph to "Augury, London" and telephone to 9887 Central. All these distracting injunctions are of happy omen and focussed intention. "Seymour House" and "Waterloo Place" evoke sentiments of aristocratic tradition and National Glory. But where am I to dine?

'London, S.W. is boldly imprinted, but vague. I had guessed so much.

'The R—T— makes me confident, even confiding. But these injunctions, directions, legends, and emblems—elephant and all—though impressive

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are beside the mark. Where, I repeat, do we meet, eat, drink, think, and babble of the Empire?

'I have experienced a General Election. Bold placards and consequent antiquities I know. They make for un-precedented Liberal majorities. But for the old, sound, Tory habit of Dining they are too modern.

'Even in the Stone Age our hirsute ancestors indicated by hoarse cries the particular cave in which flesh should be torn and bones gnawed. Now we have Wine. But the wisdom of the ages still enjoins a definite statement of where it is to flow.

'Our political opponents refuse a programme and state that—in the meanwhile—they are in favour of the Cardinal Virtues.

'*You give me the picture of an elephant.*

'*I ask where is my cabman to drive me to-morrow night?*'

Here is another, with pleasant directions for a holiday ramble:

'I will let myself go to you, after a day well spent.

'But, first, let me tell you all I can discern from maps that may guide you and Ger on your return from Aix.

'I. Go to Bourg.

'II. Go to Beaune and there seek out L'Hôtel de la Poste. Make a friend of the Patron. Say that Mr George Wyndham, who ordered a barrel of Burgundy and was there the last week in August, told you of that enchanting hostelry. Ask for the

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old cognac. Invite your host to take a glass of it with you. Touch on the coincidence that Westminster and Percy alighted there and drank that same divine liquor. If invited—as you will be—to visit his “caves”—or cellars as the vulgar have it: visit them, and taste the whole adoration of Dionysos out of a shallow silver saucer. When these rites are accomplished, you may gaze at (a) the Church, (b) the beffroy (or Belfry), (c) the Hospital.

‘III. Go to *Avallon*, and let your aim be the Hôtel du Chapeau Rouge, the Inn of the Red Hat. There you will be well entertained. And, in getting there, you will have traversed a part of Le Morvan, which is as much as to say, a region older than the *Provinces* of France (I take no heed of the *Départements*). But this region is so old that it keeps its name in despite of provinces and their Dukes, and their vintages.

‘It is—on the map—made up of a bit of Burgundy and a bit of the Nivernais.

‘But no Duc de Bourgogne—not even Charles the Bold—no Duc de Nevers, ever conquered the people of Le Morvan.

‘Like the Welsh or the inhabitants of Connaught of Ireland, they have never been conquered—and—they have never done anything. They inhabit an island in Europe—3000 feet up in the air—and keep geese and tie up gates with rope-ends. It is curious to note *hedges*, and tied gates, and slatternly houses in France.

‘They belong to the STONE AGE.

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‘IV. Go to Vézalay from Avallon.

‘It is true that you make an acute angle westward.

‘But mark the contrast.

‘At Beaune you were in the Roman Empire. In Le Morvan you were in the remnants of the Stone Age. But at Vézalay you are in the palpitating explosion of the XIIth Century.

‘It was not Roman, but because it was Catholic—Catholique—it had 120,000 inhabitants in the Xth, XIth, and XIIth Centuries, now it has 800. It was attacked by Saracens.

‘Here, on March 31, 1147 (or, 46, choose your old or new style), St Bernard preached the second Crusade to Louis VII. and Conrad the emperor, and to Eleanor, who was to marry our Henry II.

‘Here our Richard—Yea or Nay—was preached to before the Crusade of 1187 (8? 9?). This was a great Hub of Europe and now dreams. Let me add that some blighter has chronicled the fact that Bèze,—worse than Calvin—was born there.

‘V. From *Vézelay* go on to Auxerre—with three great churches—and a really good modern Inn, “des Touristes.”

‘VI. After that, take the old road from Rome to Paris and think over the centuries, recalling, for your intimate delight, that the Scots were nearer to the French, and the centre, than the Saxon Pock-Puddings during many years. Let that flatter your Boreal Vanity.

‘To be terse,

‘i. Bourg

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‘ii. Beaune

‘iii. Avallon

‘iv. Auxerre (via Vézelay)

‘v. Paris (Melun), and remember that *Sens* is the place where *B. William* of Sens came from to build our Canterbury Cathedral, but where

‘A. The Gauls came from to

‘i. Overrun Asia Minor and name Galicia,

‘ii. Burn Rome—you remember Brennus.

‘iii. Burn Moscow (tempo Napoleon I.).

‘iv. Now they are a centre of Anti-Catholicism, and Socialism, and the Lord knows what, and may—such is their “verve”—burn the whole blasted show.

‘Yours in the bond, G. W.

‘P.S.—You may well ask why I began this letter with a reference to a day well spent. I will tell you.

‘I got up early,

‘Went to Chapel,

‘Ran round the garden,

‘Worked like a dynamo at the Rectorial address,

‘Rode after luncheon,

‘Worked like an aeroplane at the address,

‘Dined,

‘Solved all the knots in the address,

‘Wrote to Walter Blaikie asking him to print it, and then—and only then—sketched—see *supra*—to C. B.—the road he might follow with advantage to C. B. and Ger.’

Indeed it is in his letters, and only in them, that George Wyndham, as his friends knew him, can

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be revealed to others. It is good news if it is true that Mr Charles Whibley is presently to publish a selection of Wyndham's prose-writings with his own memoir and criticisms. But it is in the letters that you get the mirth, the unchilled heart, the outpouring of fancy, the reflected happiness of his home. . . . They reflect also a genius for friendship. . . .

His judgment of people was curious. One has heard his judgment of character blamed. Rather he had two scales, and with one he tested people occultly but with amazing shrewdness and penetration. In eighteen years of intimacy let one testify that he never heard George Wyndham gossip or utter an unkind word of anybody. But we remember how, when character had to be weighed in matters of moment, his—'I daresay it is my wicked mind, but I think,' etc. etc.; and he hit the nail like a clairvoyant. But that was for use in the Conning Tower only, and his treatment of people was otherwise determined. He saw far more than the Scottish say 'he let on,' but he had a wonderful faith of getting the best out of people by believing in them. 'They say — is impossible. All I can say is I have got on with a lot of wonderfully impossible people.' If he ever paid for that policy he did not repine, believing that we are not to be hurt by things from outside. And he had his successes.

One such is recalled across the years—a man long dead, able and sterling too in his day, warmly appreciated by the one or two who knew him

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but perennially unlucky over money. There was trouble about a cheque received by him but not sent on to its proper recipient. The matter had to go before Wyndham. One waited in some trepidation knowing that in this case severity must spell ruin, and doubtful here of the justice and wisdom of the letter of the Law. But Wyndham wrote: 'If X has made a muddle of this I am sorry, and he must make good the amount when he can. Meanwhile I have sent on a cheque to Y (the proper quarter) and have explained that there has been a mistake. He will accept this, and there I propose to leave things. We shall not otherwise be too conscientious. Remember we don't judge people by what they have done but by what they are, and X is a good man who has had, in a way I have not known, to struggle with adversity.' The lesson was not lost, and Wyndham's action proved here, as elsewhere, wise as well as merciful. Almost the last words I heard from X on his deathbed were, 'How kind George Wyndham is.' He had not told anyone, but it seemed that he had been constant in his attendance and inquiry at that forlorn sick-bed.

But it is time to have done, and one is an unconscionable time a-writing. It would be a happiness if any image of what George Wyndham was should take form out of this multiplicity of words. You must think of him as one fortunate, a darling of the gods, if you like, but, except in the perfection of his home and his life there, blessed chiefly in

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that character which his intimates knew, not people generally. No doubt but he had his defects, his thorns in the flesh. He was immensely high-strung; was much of Celt, though less Irish, some of us must feel, than Highland Scots—'a Breadalbane Campbell' he declared himself once; and a first glimpse of him discovered one living his life too eagerly. 'Irritable,' he constantly deplored that he was: we should be lucky in that case if we attain his self-mastery. He had his ups and downs as such a temperament must have. But he always overthrew despondency, notably when he espied any service he could do another. Only once did he suggest an instant of self-consciousness—self-pity was impossible to him—and a sense of what he gave to others. Late one most memorable winter night of '96 we were leaving Mr Henry James. 'I felt,' said the Master, 'that something rich and romantic had happened in my high hermitage.' Wyndham stopped in the road and looked up at the lighted window, saying rather wistfully, 'I wish I saw *him* oftener. You know one has to keep other people going, but up there, you know, *he* gives.' . . . He himself gave indeed: not money merely, if need were, but time, strength, knowledge, information were all at the disposal of his friends. And more; for he thought for his friends at all times, in all situations, carrying their affairs about with him, sitting down to consider even to the degree of worrying, about what in any given circumstances they should do. It was as if some one should look like Pavlova and be all the time your nurse!

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His subordinates were like brothers. Long after they left him he was careful and troubled about their 'careers.' . . . Say you went to South Africa, counsel, introductions, a cable of 'God-speed' at Madeira, saw you on your way. How many of the plain stodgy people of this world do so much, or lay on themselves so many of the little trying duties like this figure from the Prado at Madrid? You returned; it was essential that you came to receive, first of all, *his* welcome; there would be a feast decreed as by one schoolboy to another. As your special reward and happiness so offered and so received, you were promised early audience in his Home. . . . And this is vital: Your case was not exceptional, as your merits, goodness knows, were ordinary enough. It was everyone's case, everyone's who was his friend. . . .

If you care to know what George Wyndham was, forget about his being beautiful, brilliant, and the rest; he was good. No man was ever less of a prig, but not yet encountered is the prig who attains in actual practice to his standards. He lives, one feels, somewhere in a real not transcendental sense, but for his friends, he lives, everywhere, about them.

Fortunate are they who hold him from the past in a score of gallant pictures. Happier that looking up, as they stump along in the column, they know that somewhere up the line, brave, brilliant, but ever thoughtful for others, marches the Colour-Sergeant.



